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SIPDIS

WHA/CCA FOR DAVID MCFARLAND

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SUBJECT: TURKEY REVIEW FOR LIBERTAD ACT: RELATIONS WITH  
CUBA DEFINED BY MINIMALISM

REF: STATE 126578

Classified By: Economic Counselor Dale Eppler for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Turkey's relations with Cuba are limited and its investment on the island is nonexistent. The two countries conduct a yearly Joint Economic Commission (JEC) meeting, most recently chaired in March in Ankara by Cuba's Minister for Foreign Economic Relations and Foreign Investment and Turkey's State Minister for Foreign Trade. There is no bilateral trade agreement between the two countries, and Turkey does not have any Cuban doctors working in country. Turkey has authorized scholarships for three Cuban students to study in Turkey, but has had trouble finding any interested takers. End summary.

12. (C) MFA Latin America Department Section Chief Mehmet Aytun told us the Turkish government has not taken any specific action to condemn human rights abuses in Cuba, though the GOT participates in European Union efforts to draw attention to human rights abuses and Turkey obviously supports the advancement of both democracy and human rights in Cuba.

13. (C) Pursuant to an economic cooperation agreement signed in 1996, Turkey participates in a yearly bilateral Joint Economic Commission (JEC) with the Government of Cuba. The most recent meeting occurred in March 2008. Cuban Minister of Foreign Economic Relations and Foreign Investment, Marta Lomas Morales, chaired the JEC with Turkish Foreign Trade Minister, Kursad Tuzmen, and met with Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Cicek in Ankara. In the past six months, there have not been any high-level diplomatic visits between Cuba and Turkey.

14. (C) Aytun confirmed that Cuba has no exchange programs with Turkey, does not sponsor Cuban doctors working in Turkey, and does not pay for medical travel for Turkish citizens. The GOT has authorized a scholarship program for up to three Cuban students to study in Turkey every year, but has had difficulty finding even three students interested in the program. Aytun noted that Turkey sent a small cash contribution to Cuba following the recent hurricanes to help with humanitarian assistance.

15. (C) Turkish Foreign Trade Undersecretariat (FTU) Americas Department Head for Agreements, Atilla Bastirmaci, told us that Turkey and Cuba's total bilateral trade volume for 2008 is expected to be around \$35 million, a slight increase from last year. The overwhelming majority of this is Turkish consumer goods exports to Cuba, with about \$2 million dollars in Cuban imports to Turkey, mostly Cuban rum, cigars and sugar and some Hepatitis B vaccines. There is no preferential trade agreement between the two countries, although Cuba is the only Caribbean country with which FTU officials maintain a regular trade-related dialogue.

16. (C) Bastirmaci told us that there is no Turkish investment in Cuba, but FTU officials hope to increase Turkish exports to the island, and Turkish contractors are interested in entering the housing and renovation market if and when the opportunity arises. A small delegation from Turkey attended the Havana Trade Fair in November, with one glasswork company exhibiting at the show.

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